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"Varaha Avathara of Vishnu in Art and Literature of Tamil Nadu"

2008

(IWA Endowment Lecture)

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FOREWORD

International Women's Association Constituted an Endowment Lecture in 1996 in the Government Museum, Chennai. Since 1997 several eminent scholars like Prof. William Skelton, Colgate University, U.S.A., delivered lectures in this angust theatre. This year Dr.S. Vasanthi, Archeologist, Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, Chennai is going to deliver her lecture titled "Varaha avathara of Vishnu in Art and Literature of Tamil Nadu" today. This is the eleventh Endowment Lecture in this series. She had traced the third avatara of Vishnu from the literature and Art of Tamil Nadu. I hope that scholars and students would benefit from this lecture.

Chennai - 600 008
Date: 1.12.2008

Principal Secretary &
Commissioner of Museums.

VARAHA AVATARA OF VISHNU IN ART AND LITERATURE OF TAMIL NADU

Introduction

Hinduism believes in one supreme God but allows the Hindus to worship Him in any form that one likes. The Hindu deities can be worshipped in temples and houses. And Brahmā, Vishnu and Śiva, the Trinity of Hindu religion are assigned with the duties of Creation, Protection and Destruction. The Creation and Destruction are done at certain phases while the act of Protection is a long process that falls between the two acts. It is believed that Vishnu takes incarnation or avatāra to destroy the evil Asurās and protect the earth from destruction whenever the need arises.

The term `avatāra' is applied to the act of the God coming down in the form of man or animal to the earth and living there in that form till the purpose for which he had descended on the earth was accomplished. Although the number of avatāras is considered to be twenty two, only ten avatāras of Vishnu are accepted widely.

"Matsya, Kurmo, Varāhasca,
Narsimhasca,Vāmanāh!
Rāmo, Rāmasca, Ramasca,
Krsnāh, Kalkin Janārdanāh"!!

Are the benedictory verses of Jayadeva the eminent saint poet. In the above verse, it is stated that Viṣṇu took the avatāra of Matsya (Fish), Kurmo (Tortoise), Varāha (Boar), Narasimha (Lion), Vāmana (dwarf), Rāmo (Parasuram), Rāmasca (Sri Rāma or Dasarathi Rāma), Rāma (Balarāma), Kṛiṣna and he is yet to take the avatār of Kalkin to protect the world from the sins. The first, avatāra, Matsya avatāra was to save the ship with all living things of the world. The second avatāra, Viṣṇu assumed the form of a Kurma (tortoise) raised the mount Meru and functioned as a pivot at the time of churning the Pārkadal

(milky) ocean by devas and the Asurās, to obtain amṛta (nectar). The third, Varāha avatāra gained greater popularity. There are many Purānanic stories connected with this incarnation.

The ecological factors also greatly influenced the ritualistic social and religious systems of ancient societies, as proved from archaeological evidences. Because of the interlinking some common factors were observed in all the early civilizations of the world. One such factor was the story connected with the great Flood and the gods as the saviours of earth. The great flood or deluge was caused due to extensive rain, overflow of river or the swelling of the sea, or due to heavy snowfall. The ancient literatures of Greek, Mesopotamia, Finland, Burma, Indonesia, China, North, and South America, Mexico and India talk about the great flood that occurred once upon a time and the legend about the submerging of the earth. In India there are evidence which stands as testimony.

The scientific birth and age of the earth and the evolution theory adopted in the Puranic literatures of India coincides with this hypothesis. The age of the planet earth is considered to be about 4600 million years and life began on it some 3.54 million years ago. According to some scholars, the geological timetable of evolution of man and the avatarā concept of Viṣṇu has some similarities. The first avatarā is that of a fish (matsya) which survives only in water, the second turtle (Kurmā), which can live in water as well as on land, the third boar (Varāha) can exist on land and in water the fourth beast man-lion (homo-erectus) (Narsimha) which lives only on land. This study is in the preliminary stage. Thus, the ideology of its wild boar, great flood and submerged earth of the ancient societies of the world were reflected in the Varāha concept of Hinduism.

The wild boars or pigs are generally called the animals of the farmers. In the Central and Northern Europe, the grunting boars which up rooted and grabbed the crops were believed to represent storm, thunder, cloud and cyclone and the mighty tusks were compared with lightening. The Pigs and the wild boar were offered to gods and goddesses at the time of ceremonies connected with pregnancy, death, sowing of seeds and harvest. There was a belief that a boar or sow was considered to be the embodiment of the spirit of corn and thus the last harvest was called as Rye-boar. In ancient Greece and Rome, pigs were sacrificed as the mark of surplus growth of crops. Pigs were even seen as a symbol of good luck in Indonesian islands. Black and red pigs were even sacrificed to obtain rain and at the time of planting the crops .In China and Some of the South East Asian countries pigs and the wild boar were associated with planting. The boar or pig was regarded as auspicious and worshipped by the people of the ancient civilizations and their habit of rooting up the soil led man to learn the art of ploughing. The ferocity and valour shown by the boar might have been admired by them; hence they started worshipping boar as Varāha.

LITERATURE

The Historical period of Tamil Nadu starts from Śangam age (3rd Century BCE-2nd Century CE). The unearthed antiquities from the excavations in early historic sites of Tamil Nadu reveal the fact that the Śangam age (of classical Tamil literature) and Iron Age (Megalithic period) of Tamil Nadu are contemporary. The early history of the Tamil land is traced from the Śangam literature of the first three centuries of Common Era. The Tamil literary works can be broadly classified as Śangam literatures, Bhakthi and Post Bhakthi literature. The Śangam works which reflect the social and religious life of the

Tamil people are mostly of secular in nature. They describe nature, human feelings, love, conjugal life, war, etc. Pathuppattu, an anthology of ten poems, and Ettuthokai a collection of eight anthologies, are two major Sangam Classics. The then Tamil land was designated into five geological areas as tiṇais with their respective landscape, crops and gods. The kings being regarded as the protector of their respective lands were personified as God of that region.

The rise of the Bhakti movement in the Tamil country, from 6th to 9th century CE, resulted in the writing of volumes of religious literary hymns. Nālāyiradivyaprabandham and Devāram hymns of both Vaishnavā and Śaivā literature are the outcome of the Bhakthi movement in Tamil Nadu. They also throw valuable light on Vaiṣṇavisim and Śaivism and their cult worship. The post Bhakthi Tamil literary works such as Bharani, Ula, literary works and Kambaramanayam, Periyapurānam also praise Lord Varāha and describe the act of lifting the earth from the ocean in various contexts.

The Paripādal of Ettuttogai is an important source for the study of Vaiṣṇava concepts in TamilNadu. Of the seventy poems of this collection, only twenty–two and a few fragments are available. Out of them six songs are about Viṣṇu, eight are about Murugan and eight of them are about Vaiyai river (Vaigai) There are references Tirupparangunṛam and Tirumāliruñjñōlai temples and the presiding deities of these temples. The scholars believe that the descriptions of Viṣṇu in this work closely resemble the descriptions found in Pāncarātra texts and the Nārāyaniya section of the Mahābhārata. Paripādal the Śangam work was written at a time when the Nārāyaṇa cult and Bhāgavata religion synchronized into Vaiṣṇava religion. There are a number of references of Viṣṇu

and his avatāra concepts in it. The Varāha avatāra was mentioned in Śangam literatures whenever the act of Viṣṇu was extolled and venerated as the rescuer of earth. Illam Peruvazhudhiyar, the composer of the second Paripādal, describes the destruction of the earth in various occasions due to many geological factors and the existence of earth was challenged every time. In this verse, it is narrated that when the earth was submerged in the water, Viṣṇu took the form of Varāha and retrieved the earth to her original position. This act of Varāha was praised, and an epoch was named as Varāha Kalpa after Varāha.

Seikuri yēttagn kazhippiya vahimurai
Kezhal thigazhvark kōlamōdu peyariya
Ūzhi oruvinai unarthalin muthumaikku
Ūzhi yāvarum unarā......... (2:15-19)

In the same poem it is stated that while Varāha rescued the earth from the waters he is believed to have married the earth goddess.

Seyyōl Śernda nin Māsil agala
Valartirai manniya kilarpori nāppan
Pulli nilanum puraipadal aritena (2—31-35)

The eminent scholar Dr. Chempakalakshmi states that Vedic Viṣṇu and the worship of earth goddess originated and developed in South and refers to it as the syncretism between the worship of the Vedic Viṣṇu and that of the popular earth goddess. She also mentions that "henceforth the representation of Bhūdevi as one of the consorts of Viṣṇu becomes very common in the South." Dr. Chempakalakshmi also cites an example where the author of the Paripādal in a particular line the idea of Bhūdevi as one of the consorts of Viṣṇu does not favoured and does not accept Bhūdevi as a consort because Tiru or Śri (Lakshmi) is said to be residing in his chest. But there are a number of references about the association of Viṣṇu with earth and the lifting of Bhūdevi by Varāha. The Śangam work Maduraikānchi mentions;

'Nilanthantha peruathavi

Pōlanthār mārpin nediyōn (Mad. Kanchi. 60-61)

Which means that earth was restored because of the kindness of Viṣṇu .And in on other verse of the same work Viṣṇu was referred as *Nilantharu thiruvin nediyōn...* (Mad.Kanchi 763) in this verse Viṣṇu is said to be the husband of the earth goddess. Hence, we can not accept the statement of Dr.Champakalakshmi that the association of earth goddess with Varāha as his consort was developed in the South. The Paripadal poet for the sake of poetic excellence might have mentioned that he does not accept Bhūdevi as a consort of Viṣṇu because Tiru or Śri (Lakshmi) is said to be already residing in his chest. To some extent it can be inferred that Varāha and his association with Bhūdevi was known to the Tamil society from the early period and the worship of Bhūdevi as consort of Viṣṇu had its foothold in the South due to the worship of Varāha which was very popular in South India.

The third Paripādal by Kaduvaṇ Illaveyiyanar, describes that Viṣṇu in the form of Varāha rescued the earth from the water, at the same time he himself took the form of swan and protected the same earth from the heavy rain.

Úzhiyāzhiekka nirunila murukezhu
Kelayai maruppi nuzhutho yenavum,
Māvisum pozhthu punal varalavana
Sevalai sirakarp plartheyo yenavum (3- 25-28)

The same poet in the fourth poem narrates the act of Varāha who saved the earth from the floods, and this act was compared with the work of the mountain Meru.

Puruvathu Karuval Kanthaththār
Rā kiyive vulakan tantadip paduthathai Naduvan
Ongya palar pugaļ kuntrnoduokkum (4-23-24)

The 13th song of Paripadal states the Lord who sleeps in the Pārkadal (milky ocean), he who holds the plough in his hand, he who raised the earth from the ocean and he who was called as Rudra and Brahma and Tirumal, all the three are one and the same

Nirmum Valaivāi Nañj lōnum
Nānilan thulakura muzhumuthanaṟṟiya
Polampunai étha zhani manimadr perani....... (13: 39-41)

Hence, it is inferred that the worship of Varāha avatāra gained predominance in the Śangam period and had been reflected in the cultural and religious history of that period.

Āḻvārs were the hymnologists, who sought, felt, experienced and realized the ardent devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. They were from different castes and different walks of life. The showed true devotion to God, and completely surrendered themselves to Him. They traveled from place to place and sang in praise of the local deity, later on these holy places were called as Divya Desas. There are 108 Divya desas where in the respective gods of those places were eulogised and are called as Mangalāsasana.

The traditional accounts of the āḻvārs are twelve in number. The first three Poygai, Pūdam and Pēy are said to be the earlier Vaiṣṇava āḻvārs of fifth to sixth century CE, the other āḻvārs belong to the seventh to ninth CE. They adopted the āgamic form of worship, which caused the rise of temples and the worship of the icons in the temples. They emphasised the importance of archa form, which is within the easy reach of one and all. Thus The Purana stories and Bhāgavata stories gained momentum and iconographic forms of Viṣṇu became popular in TamilNadu.

The first three, Poygai, Pūdam and Pēy āḻvārs mention Varāha as the lifter of earth when they praise Viṣṇu and his attributes. Poygai āḻvār describes the act of Viṣṇu as

Varāha in six hymns while Pūdat āḷvār mentions Varāha in four places; on the other hand Pēy āḷvār mentions this avātara in two places. The examination of the hymns by ālvārs reveals that the act of lifting the earth by Varāha was very popular and was venerated in their hymns. Poygai āḷvār in one hymn states that the sand still present on the tusk of the boar was same as that it was sticking on his foot while he was taking three strides. He also states that in Tiruvikrama avatāra the Lord measured the earth with one foot, as Varāha the Lord held the entire earth on His horn.

In another hymn the same āḷvār expresses his astonishment on the earth becoming small as to enable Varāha to raise it from the ocean. The Bhāgavata stories of Kṛṣṇa appear to be very popular in the seventh to ninth centuries in TamilNadu, most of the āḷvārs hymns praise child Kṛṣṇa for his characteristic fondness for eating butter, curd etc., they also praise Viṣṇu in his order of avatarā forms. There are many references to Varāha in the Divyaprabandham hymns as the lifter of the earth from the ocean but they do not mention any one of the stories connected with Varāha in the cosmological ideology, i.e. Prajapathi or Brahma as Varāha restoring the earth.

The next āḷvār Pūdathat āḷvār also mentions the glory of Viṣṇu as the lifter of earth in his hymns. He says that if a person worships God with a fragrant Kūrā flower, definitely God bestows His blessings on him. In the other song āḷvār states that although Sridevi already resides with Varāha, Bhūdevi chose to be with Him because the beauty of the Varāha attracts both of them. Pēy āḷvār describes that Venkadamalai belongs to Varāha who brought out at the universe with his wild tusk. Hence from this hymn it is inferred that once this hill belonged to Varāha. Thirumazhsai āḷvār of 6th to 7th century CE, narrates lifting of the earth by Varāha with his tusk, the āḷvārs generally refer to

Varāha when they praise the first three avatāras; as Tarani Idanthu, Padaitha pār, Idanthu panṟyāi, Nadantha Kālgaḷ Nonthanvō, Nadunga Nālam Ēnamāi. The āḷvār express his deep feeling over the God another hymn as the God's legs might have been paining as he walked across the forest in his Ramaavatāra and has body pain due to the lifting of the earth from the ocean in his Varāha avatāra. He also refers to Lakshmi as Pōdilkilathi while Earth goddess as Bōdalakilathi, which means that God loves to hold her in his Varāha form.

Periyāḷvār of 8th century also mentions the two acts; Varāha, who fought and killed the demon Hiranyakasha in the form of black boar, which is used to play in the forest, land and brought the earth from the ocean with his tusk In another poem he addresses god whose complexion is sea blue and who took the form of boar, turtle, and fish. In the hymn alvar states that the people praised his act of holding the earth goddess and married her. The god who fought against Hiranyakasha as Varāha with his tusk and as lion against Hiranyakasipu is the same one who is residing at Srirangam. The āḷvār says that the Lord of Srirangam had taken the forms of fish, turtle, boar, lion, vāmana, Parasurama, Dasaratharāma, Balarāma and Kalki. It is inferred that though the name of Kṛṣṇa is not mentioned in the above verse he is the favourite deity for Periyāḷvār who devoted many verses to Him.

Godāi or Āndāl is well known as the only woman āḷvār of Śrī Vaiṣnavism. She is said to be the adopted daughter of Periyāḷvār. She sought the love of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and wished to be married to him alone. She composed two major works, namely Tiruppāvāi and Nācciyār Tirumoḷi. The former is of rare beauty, revealing the preparations for gaining Śrī Kṛṣṇa as husband and the latter is a composition reflecting her mind, when

she imagines and dreams of her marriage with him. Nācciyār Tirumoli is a study in rapture of contemplation, meditation, concentric and continuous absorption in the beauty of God. One discerns in this composition the whole gamut of sensory, vital, erotic, mental and spiritual feelings interpenetrating in such a way as to present a heightened condition of mystic union. As she is the staunch devotee of Kṛṣṇa, she does not mention the other avatāras of Viṣṇu, but a verse in Nācciyar Tirumoli refers the Varāha as the wealthy man from Tiruvarangam, i.e., the god of Śrīrangam in the olden days he who took the form of boar with his unclean body; with sweating and restored the earth from the ocean. The asuras said something about the boar, which was not bearable by her.

Kulaśekhara ālvār, was the ruler of Kerala, in the 9th century CE, his hymns reveal a general warming up of the religious passion between the individual soul and God. His hymns are called as Perumāl Tirumoḷi (Godhead) and Mukundamāla (in Sanskrit); he always yearned to worship at the shrine of Śriranganātha on the Kāverī at Śrirangam. He used to praise the Viṣṇu who killed seven buffalos; took the earth by his tusk; killed Ravāvanā as Rāma; took three strides for the sake of Indra. Kulasakekhara ālvārs another work in Sanskrit was Mukundamāla. Mukundamāla expresses his devotion to Kṛṣṇa by garlanding with slokas, which confers liberation from the worldly affairs. The sixth sloka praises the god and address him as the killer of the demon Naraka son of Bhūmi. There is a story associated with Narakāsura, who sprang from the union of Viṣṇu in his boar form with the goddess Mahí or Chāyā and was made as the lord of the city of Pragjyotisa by his divine father, i.e., Viṣṇu. The tenth and thirteenth slokas also mention the killing of the demon Naraka. The tenth sloka does not directly mention the killing of Naraka but it is stated that Kṛṣṇa, killed the asura, Mura who was the guardian

of the capital city Pragjyothisha of Naraka. Hence, Kṛṣṇa was called as Murari. Thirteenth sloka addresses his mind not to be anxious about the crossing of the ocean of material existence, only the devotion to the lotus eyed Lord Kṛṣṇa, who killed Narakasura, would take it to the shore of the ocean. Hence, from the above verses it is inferred that the story of Naraka, son of Varāha was known at that time and worship of Varāha was in vogue.

Tirumangai āḻvār of 8th century CE narrates the act of Varāha in 26 places. Tirumangai āḻvār also known as Parakālan, Kaliyan was a petty chieftain of Āli-nādu near Sirkāli. He became the ardent devotee of Viṣṇu through love of a Vaiṣṇava girl, Kumudavalli who married him and later became one of the most voluminous hymnists of Śri Vaiṣṇava religion. Tirumangai āḻvār has written many compositions by travelling widely and visited several shrines all over south India. His hymnal collection comprises the Periya Tirumoḻi 1,084), madals, Periyatirumadal (78) and Siriya Tiurmadal (40); Dandakas (staff) Tirukkuruntāndakam (20) Tiruneduntāndakam (30); Tiruveḻukurrirukkai (1) (surrender). The total pasurams are 1361, and he was also a master of the spiritual art of divine love. His works contain valuable historical data on the different battles fought by the Pallava Emperor Nandivarman Pallavamallā against Chalukyās, Pandyās, and other contemporary political powers. The flourishing condition of some of the temple towns and villages such as those in Kānchi, Tirukōvalūr, Nāngūr, Kumbakōnam, Tirumalai and Chidambaram are portrayed in his poems. The worship of Varāha gained popularity through his hymns. Generally his poems show the love –hate relationship of the female towards the Almighty. It is known as Virāha-bhakti a sentiment found popular in the hymns of Tirumangai āḻvār.

In one of his poems Tirumangali ālvār characterizes himself to as Sevelitāi (foster mother) of the bride and narrates to the lord of Tiruvidandai her daughter's deep love and yearning for him. She narrates that as the girl did not show any interest in the worldly affairs and had ruined her health due to the constant pining over her Lord who is the Lord of Tiruvidandai. Tirumangai āḻvār in his Periya Tirumoḻi narrates the Lord of Tiruvidandai and the love and affection shown by a girl who was in love with him. In another hymn when the ālvar praises the god at Tiruvenkadam, he also mentions the god who resides at Tiruvidandai god, Varāha are one and the same. And also in Peiryathirumadal Tirumangai ālvār mentions that the god has rescued the earth from the deluge in the form of Varāha. The hymns of Tirumangai ālvār reveal his affinity for Varāha avatāra. There are a number of hymns which praise Lord Varāha housed in various temples.

Saint Śatakopa alias Nammāḻvār is held in the highest esteem as the Master Mystic of Śri Vaiṣṇvism. He was recognized as the Kulapati (founder–seer) of ŚriVaiṣṇava theology. He is endearingly called as Nammālvār. He wrote four works, namely Tiruviruttam, Tiruvāsarīyam, Tiruvāymoḻi and Periya Tiruvandādi.The alvār in his works has epitomized the experiences of God as the Ultimate person beyond all senses and knowledge. He has also personified God as eternal personality having fully exemplified in Him the mythic- history that the Purāṇas, Itihāsas and Vedic seers have represented. One of the hymns of Nammāḻvār who overwhelmed and glorified the act of Viṣṇu in His lying, dwelling, standing postures, measuring the worlds, and entering below the earth and uplifting the same, also hiding it and revealing. In the same verse ālvār also says that Varāha has embraced the lady of the Earth (Bhūdevi) and questions

that who can ever measure God's love? Who can know my Lord. While mentioning about the temple at Tirumālirunchoḷai he says that this temple belongs to Varāha who brought back the earth during the deluge with his tusk. From this hymn it can be inferred that the main deity at Tirumālirunchoḷai might be Varāha during that period. Āḻvār also praise the god who took the goddess of earth the nether region and brought back to her original position. The ālvār refer the god of Srivaramangalam as he who restored the earth goddess in the form of Varāha. He also states that when the god took the earth from the ocean the seven islands the seven hills and the seven seas did not got disturbed and also did not change from their position.

Devotional literatures of Saiva literature are known as Panniru Thirumuraikal . There are a number of references about Varāha in the Saiva literatures such as Tēvāram, Tiruvāsagam of this period. There are a number of references of Varāha in these hymns, whenever the Śaiva saints praised Śiva in the Lingothbhava form of representation. The act of Varāha was narrated as he who burrowing the earth to find out the extent of the foot of the pillar of Śiva in the form of fire. Tēvāram, hymns of Appar narrates the act of Varāha. Sambandar mentions in his Tiruvalnkādu pathigam, that Lord Śiva wore the tusk The act of Varāha burrowing down the earth to reach the foot of the pillar of fire was narrated in the following lines of Tiruvāsagam by Mānikavāsagar. It is stated that both Varāha and Brahma were not able to reach the fire of pillar. Which is the Lingothbhava form of Śiva.

The episode of Kirātārjuna mūrthi was often referred in the Tēvāram, Tiruvāsagam hymns. It was the story which mentions the fight between Arjuna and Śiva

to get the dead Varāha. This story attracted the Saiva saints and they often mentioned this story in their hymns.

Thus bhakthi movement by both āḷvārs and nāyanmārs gave rise to the temple building activities in Tamil Nadu. The various iconographic forms of the gods came into existence. The *avatāra* concept of Viṣṇu, and the heroic acts of Siva and his forms also gained popularity during this period. Philosophy of the āḷvārs is deeply indebted to the Vedic and Puranic scriptures. They were also conversant with the āgamas which provided them with the concrete worship of icons. Hence the Varāha avātara of Viṣṇu had gained importance from 6th to 9th century CE, which had revealed in the hymns of the alvārs which in turn reflected in the art and religious thought process of that period.

ART

The Vaikhānasāgama texts gives descriptions of three types of Varāha namely *Ādivarāha*, Praḷayavarāha and Yajñavarāha. The Ādivarāha form is depicted; in a standing posture while both Praḷayavarāha and Yajñavarāha are said to be in seated position accompanying with his consorts Bhūdevi and Śrīdevi.

Bhūvarāha, or Ādivarāha

The Vaikhānasāgama describes that the god is shown as sitting or standing postures and with four hands; two of them holding conch and discuss and the other two supporting and embracing the earth goddess, the right leg of the god is slightly bent and to be rest on hood of the mythical serpent Śēshanāga shown with his consort. The lower left hand is shown as supporting the legs of Bhūdevi. The goddess is seated on the gods bent right knee with her legs hanging down; the right hand of Varāha goes around the waist of the earth goddess. The boar face of the god should be slightly tilted looking at the goddess

and touching the bosom of the goddess, the colour of the god is prescribed as darkness of twilight. The earth goddess is in anjali attitude, her face should be slightly lifted up and turned towards her lord, and should express shyness and joy. The Silparatna gives a slightly different description in which Varāha in Nṛivarāhamurthi should have gada and padma and carries Bhūdevi on the tusk. According to Vishṣudharmōttara, the Hiranayaksha is considered to be the embodiment of ignorance while Varāha is considered to be the eternal wisdom.

Yajnavarāha

Another form of Varāha is Yajnavarāha. In this form Varāha has to be of white complexion, and should have four arms, two of which are to carry the śankha and the charka; to be seated on simhāsana, with the right leg hanging down and the left resting upon the seat; the goddess Lakshmi seated position with golden yellow colour. In her right hand she should hold a nilōtpala flower and the left hand should rest upon the seat.

Pralaya Varāha

Pralaya Varāha depicted to be seated in simhāsana, with the right leg hanging down, while the left one is bent and kept resting on the seat. This image should have four arms, with usual attributes of Varāha the front lower right arm in abhaya pose, while the right rest on his thigh. The complexion of Pralaya Varāha has to be blue in colour and the image is to be clothed in yellow garments and decked with all the usual ornaments. On the right side in the same seat his consort, Bhūdevi is shown seated with right leg hanging down and the left bent and made to rest on the seat. She has to be in dark in complexion, adorned with ornaments, in the left hand she holds the utpala flower, and her

right hand should be resting upon the seat. She must be made to look at her lord with wonder which is shown through her expression of her eyes.

Vaikuṇtha

Varāha is also depicted in Vaikuṇtha or Chatur-mūrti with four heads on four directions representing Varāha, Narasimha, Viṣṇu and Saint Kapila. Vaikuṇtha nārāyana or Chatur-mūrti is the representation of Viṣṇu incorporating the four Vyūhas, Vāsudeva, Samkarshaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha; four major gunas, bala, jñāna, aiśvarya and śakti respectively. Chaturmūrti in this form has four faces and with eight arms represents the four quarters (diśaś chatasrah) and the four intermediary directions (tāvatyo vidiśāh).

According to the *Viṣṇudharmotara*, each of the vyūhas represents two specific characters (gunas) and thus the four vyūha together have four pairs of gunas, which are symbolized by the four pairs of hands and the weapons that they hold. The four faces are differently shown, the front face is human and stands for Vasudeva; the southern face is that of a lion, for Samkarshaṇa; the northern face is that of a boar standing for Pradyumana; and the face at the back is terrific Rudra standing for Aniruddha.

The worship of Vaikuṇtha Chaturmūrti was very popular in North India particularly in Kashmir; Kalhana in his Rājatharangini also refers about the temple of Vaikuṇtha Chaturmūrti at Kashmir in 12th century CE. In Central India during the medieval period Vaikuṇtha Chaturmūrti sculptures were found. It was not popularly worshipped in Tamil Nadu. But there is a temple at Kanchipuram named Vaikundaperumal temple and built by the Pallava king Nandivarman I (730-759 CE). This temple was not dedicated to Vaikuṇtha Chaturmūrti, it was the temple for the three forms of Viṣṇu (standing, sitting and reclining position). The Vijayanagara and Nayaka

kings constructed Gopuras (Entrance) of the temples, adorned them with sculptures of both Śiva and Viṣṇu forms.

Sculptures

The sculptures found in the temples are the poetic expression of the deities in stone. Stone sculptures decorate both the interiors and the exteriors of the temples; each sculpture has a precise iconographic meaning and plays a role in identifying and celebrating the principal deity housed in the temple as well as in symbolizing the Hindu cosmos.

Most of the sculptures and monuments in South India from 7th to 9th century CE were associated with one of the two most important dynasties, i.e. the Pallavas and the Pandyas. During the Sangam period the temples were constructed with perishable materials like brick and mortar. All the monuments prior to Mahendra of the Pallava dynasty were built of perishable materials like brick timber etc., and owing to temperate climate of Tamil Nadu nothing has survived. The inscription from cave temple at Mandagappattu in Villupuram district reads as 'This brickless, timberless, metalless and mortarless mansion of Lakshita was caused to be made by king Vichitrachitta for Brahmā, Īsvara and Viṣṇu". It means that this temple, dedicated to Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva was caused to be made by Vicitracitta, without the use of brick, mortar, wood or metal. The Pallava king Mahendravarman I for the first time scooped out the rock-cut caves, which were later on followed by monolithic Rāthas. In the later part of the Pallavas period the structural temples were came in to existences Dasavathara of Viṣṇu gained prominence and became the theme for the art representations. Stone sculptures of

Varāha seen at **Mahābalipuram, Nāmakkal, Tirupparankuntram, Tiruvellarari and Ennayiraum.**

The earliest stone sculptures of Varāha were from Ādivarāha mandapa at **Mahābalippuram.** In the Ādivarāha rock cut cave temple the Varāha and Trivikrama sculptures are illustrated in large panels. The story of Varāha taking the form of a boar plunged into the cosmic waters, killed Hiraṇyaksha, the demon and redeemed the earth from the depths of the primeval waters is depicted in this panel. The sculpture of Varahā has four arms, the upper two holds Chakra (in the right), Sankha (in his left) and the right lower arms is thrown round the hip of Bhū devi, who is seated on His bent right knee (Urdhvajānu posture) and the left arm holds her right leg. The snout is shown facing proper right and the loosened kucha-bandha (inner garment) of the goddess noticed fallen down over her right thigh and behind her hip. The face of the goddess is expressive of both shyness and joy. Her two hands are seen closed up in shyness below the snout of the Varāha. The right leg of the god is placed on the hoods of Śēsha-nāga with añjali posture. The Śēsha-nāga with his consort is shown bowing and with folded hands in añjali position Brahmā is depicted with three heads, standing in tribhanga posture behind Varāha. To the left of Brahmā is the figure of Nārada with Viṇā, also noticed. The ocean is depicted in the conventional way as usually seen in other sculptural representation of water with lotuses and waves. Above to the left and right side of the central figure are the figures of Chandra and Surya represented above the heads of Brahmā and the Ṛsi.

The same theme of Purana stories repeated in all most all sculptural panels at Mahābalipuram. Like wise the Varāha panel with lifting the earth goddess, Bhū devi is also repeated in the Ādivarāha cave temple, which is still under worship. The goddess is

shown seated on the right side of the god and holding her in the right side. Hence the place is known as Vala vendai which means the god holds the goddess in his right side. The Varāha in the main cave temple has similar iconographic features of the Ādivarāha rock cut mandapa at Māhabalipuram. All the figures are plastered thickly. The early Chola inscription of Rājendra I mentions the name of this temple as Paramēśvara-Mahā-Varāha-Visṇu Gṛiha. There are two labeled portrait sculptures of Sri Simhavinna-pottr–āthirājan and Sri Māhendra-pottra-thirājan, written in Pallava grantha. On the basis of paleographical grounds and sculptural style, this cave temple has been assigned to Paramēśvara I (672-700 CE). The Pallava period is the epoch of formative ideas and of new experiments in the spheres of art and iconography. The Varāha is depicted simple and beautiful with proper proportion. The standing posture of Varāha itself exhibits the vigour and vitality and also outlay the firmness in his action of rescuing the earth. The portrayal of ornaments to the god and goddess are simple and wear a very few ornaments. The neck ornament, necklaces are shown very simple without any details. The god Varāha is shown wearing Kirta mukuta in his head. Both the Varāha panel sculpture and the Adivarāha sculpture in the cave temple depict the story of Varāha as the lifter of earth in motion and life.

The recent discovery of Varāha in the form of boar found at Mahābalipuram is note worthy. A little shrine and a sculpture of Varāha in its boar form were discovered by the Archaeological Survey of India in the year 1990 to the north of the main temple complex of the shore temple. A small cylindrical shrine which stands in the southern side has a massive image of the Varāha avatāra of Viṣṇu with his snout rooting downward into the ocean, water is indicated by showing the lotus flowers under his body. This image is

carved in the bed rock in circular shape. The inscription on the front face of the pedestal of the Varāha reads as: Śrī Rājasimhah (the illustrious Lion king), Śrī Raṇajayah (the illustrious victor in battle), Śrī Śrībharah (the illustrious wonderful archer). The sculpture was damaged due to the chiseling, when the Archaeological Survey of India discovered. The first sculpture was recovered in pieces. It was later on reassembled and the original form had been restored This Varāha image is a noteworthy finding in Tamil Nadu. The zoomorphic forms of Varāha are commonly found in Central India. They are mostly of cosmological aspect of Varāha with the representation of small images of gods and goddesses. In Tamil Nadu, Varāha is depicted in anthropomorphic form. This is the first time that the Varāha in boar form is discovered at Māhabalipuram. Some scholars like Dr. Soundarrājan opine that the reclining Viṣṇu found in the Shore Temple between the two Śiva temples is it self the abhicharika form of the deity employed to defeat the enemy. But Dr. Nanditha did not accept this view and she states that the Narāyana shrine was an old one built before the shore temples of Śiva which flanks in front and back, obviously it was an old temple which originally faced the sea and Narāyana must have been the guardian deity of the sea farers. According to some scholars if the Abhicharikashayanamurthi (The inauspicious form of Viṣṇu) was installed definitely the auspicious form of some images has to be installed. Hence, as suggested by Mr. Narasimhan, the then Superintending Archaeologist of Archaeological Survey of India, Southern circle, Chennai, that the auspicious boar form might have been installed before the inauspicious form of Viṣṇu i.e. Abhicharikashayanamurthi of shore temple

The recent tsunami on (26th December 2004) has exposed a bas-relief, which appears to be part of a temple wall or a portion of the ancient port city. The excavations

at Mahābalipuram revealed the six-foot rocky structures, elaborately carved head of an elephant and a horse in flight. Above the elephant's head is a small square-shaped niche with a carved statue of a deity. Another structure uncovered by the tsunami has a reclining lion sculpted on it. According to archaeologists, lions, elephants and peacocks were common motifs used to decorate walls and temples during the Pallava period in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Superintending Archaeologist Dr.T. Satyamurthy said that, "These structures could be part of the legendary seven pagodas". Mr .K.T. Narasimhan has interpreted that the bas-relief facing west, carved inside a socket on the smaller rock was that of Yoga Narasimha. This beautiful carving depicted the Yoga Narasimha squatting and doing penance. He has also, said, "The socket framed by a lion's carving, typical of the Pallava dynasty, which built the monuments at Mamallapuram. On the socket's right side on the rock face is a carving, depicting a Varāha (Boar) lifting Būdevi (earth). Varāha is visible but not Būdevi and he points out that the Varāha shown in a moving posture. He also said these carvings were the creation of the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I (Mamalla), 630 to 668 CE." As he was a Vaishnavite, he has created the sculptures of Yoga Narasimha, Varāha and Vamana, which were incarnations of Vishnu. The adjacent bigger rock has carvings on both sides. On the western side is a socket with a carving of seated Siva. These carvings were the creation of Narasimhavarman II (690 - 728 CE), who was a Saivite and was the builder of the nearby Shore Temple. Hence, The recent Tsunami also shifted the sand and revealed the remains of a massive temple with its collapsed parts of garbhagriha, a wide country yard, prakara, terracotta ring well, a kalasha, a carved capston, a stupika and a sitting lion sculptured out of sand stone and the sculpture of Pallava king. The scholars and officials

from Archaeological Survey of India identified that this scattered portions of the temple was constructed by Rājasimha. The Underwater Archaeology wing also saw the submerged rocks to the north of shore temple and found the wall running about 70 cm in length the temples recently exposed due to Tsunami were created by both Narasimhavarman I (Mamalla), a Vaishnavite and Narasimhavarman II, who was a Saivite .According to Michael Lockwood "the extraordinary slender, cylindrical shape of the newly discovered shrine suggests that it is a novel expression of the Lingōdbhava theme". He also states that in the Lingōdbhava myth the varāha form of Viṣṇu is shown as digging downward to find the lower limit of the pillar linga. But this can not be accepted because of 8 century CE Tirumangai āḷvār praises the god Varāha, as he who sleeps in the forest at Kadal mallai, he who rescued the earth and who is also known as Gńathin ōli (light of knowledge. Āḷvar also mentions that the god who defeated the enemies and sleeps in the land as Thalasayanam this has been well attested by the fact that the Abhicharikasāyanamurti image of Viṣṇu should be lying on the floor. The great poet Dandin in the later half of the 7th century CE refers the reclining Viṣṇu image on the sea shore at Māmallapuram He also speak about the image of Viṣṇu as having been made earlier than his time. It can be assumed that the Gńapiran mentioned by Tirumangai ālvar might have been the same zoomorphic Varāha and it was installed by Rājasimha to deploy the inauspicious abhicharikashyanamurthi and it would have been broken by the Chalukayan invaders.

Another two Varāha sculptures of Pallava period from Vaikuntha Perumāl temple at Kānchipuram built by the Pallava ruler Nandivarman II (729-796) also represents the sculptural artistic value of 8th century CE. The details are not fully identified due to the

damaged condition of the sculptures. In one figure the god faces proper left and the left leg is shown in raised knee (Urdhuvajānu pose). The upper two hands have both Sankha and Cakra respectively, while the lower two hands hold the goddess. Below the left of god a figure of a man with serpent hood in añjali pose and with his consort clinging to him is also depicted. The other Varāha in standing posture with two arms, Sanka and Cakra are present in the upper arms, while the lower left hand rest on the hip of the goddess, the right hand is broken. In front of Varāha stands a male figure in añjali posture, appears to be Brahmā, above are four figures (The sages Sanka, Sanandana, Sānātana and Sanathkumara) also in the same posture.

The Varāha sculpture from **Nāmakal** (Latitude. 11o 13' N and Longitude 78o10' E) is located in Erode district. The two caves dedicated to Lakshmi Narasimha and Ānataśāyi forms of Viṣṇu. Another important Varāha sculptural panel is from Nāmakkal panels (noticed at Lakshmi Narasimha temple) depicting Varāha avatāra in which Viṣṇu took the form of a gigantic boar to rescue the earth from the demon Hiraṇyāksha who had hid earth under the sea. The figure of the Varāha depicted as emerging from the waters, with one leg hidden up to the knees, and the other just above the ankles. Bhūdevi, with her hands in the añjali hasta (pose) seated gracefully on Varāha's upraised right arm; his left hand supported her legs. To the right of Varāha is seated the serpent śesha with his left hand in the vismaya pose depicting his wonder, to the left of Varāha is a śesha's wife shown in kneeling position with her hands folded in the añjali hasta. The four heads of the sages Sanaka, Sanandana, Sānātana and Sanatkumāra, noticed above the figure of the Varāha. Varāha represented with two arms only, unlike the depictions and Varāha maṇdapa at Māmallapuram and in cave II and IV at Bādami (7th century CE) where the

figure has four arms (the upper two holding the śankha and chakra). The upward tilt of the head of the Varāha, and the feeling of momentous action pervading the relief is quite remarkable. At Māmallapuram there is a lack of this sort of atmosphere as the Varāha is depicted standing erect with both feet firmly on the ground, thus representing a moment in time slightly later than at Nāmakkal. The Badāmi relief, though depicting the Varāha with both feet having emerged from the water, still it retains a feeling of movement that makes them more akin to Nāmakkal. The tusk of the Varāha is shown prominently unlike the sculptural depictions at Māmallapuram and Badāmi. These caves were the work of one Ātiya kula king Guṇaśila in the 8th century CE. It can be inferred that the caves were dedicated to Viṣṇu and his incarnation forms such as Varāha, Tiruvikrama, Narasimha etc., this shows that the Varāha worship was prevalent in the western part of Tamil Nadu.

Another cave temple of the early period is located at **Tirupparankuṇṛam** (Latitude. 9o 53' N and Longitude 78o 04' E) about 8 kms from Madurai town. This cave was assigned to early Pandya ruler Māṛan Śadaiyaṉ alias Jatila Parānthaka Nedunjadaiyan (765-815 CE). He was responsible for the creation of the caves at Tirupparankuṇṛam and Ānamalai. He also called himself as *parama vaishnavan* (ardent follower of Vaiṣṇvism). There is sculptural representation of Varāha avatāra in the niches. Bhūdevi is shown seated on the right thigh of Varāha while nāga is depicted in worshipping posture. The Pallavas, Pandyas and the Ādiya rulers were influenced by the themes of sculptural representation Varāha, Vāmana, and Narasimha avatārs.

A small panel found at Puṇrikākṣa Perumal temple at **Tiruveḷḷaṛai,** where Varāha is shown uplifting the earth goddess and placing her on the hoods of Nāga figure. Lord

Varāha holds the goddess in his lower arms and faces left, while his upper arms are in the posture of carrying the Śankha and Chakra between his middle and index figures. This was the common feature of depicting the weapons of Viṣṇu in the Pallava period sculptural representations. This figure is dated to middle of 9th century CE.

The study of sculptural representation of Varāha from 7th century to 9th century revealed the various stylistic differences in representing Varāha during the Pallava, Pandya and Adiyaman rulers. After the Pallava and Pandya rule, the Chola's gained importance in Tamil Nadu and patronized Saivism. This had its own impact on political and social condition of this period. Saivism became the state religion. Siva temples were constructed in large numbers. But Vaiṣṇava temples also existed side by and patronized by the chola royal families ie. Rājarāja I sister Kundavai gave donations to Kundavai vinnagara temple at Dadapuram near Tindivanam in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu. The sculptural representation of Varāha from Tirubhuvani is the noteworthy example for this period as it had been mentioned in the inscriptions of Rajendra I. The Viṣṇu avatāra stories were depicted in the Śiva temple in the pillared mandapas beneath the pillars and pilasters of the devakoshtas and in some temples as a panel sculptures. Such panel sculptures are found in Brahmapurisvarar temple at Pullanmangai, Naltunai Isvaram at Punjai and the Karkotaka Isvaram at Kamarasavalli, Nagesvarar temple at Kumbakonam, the Tiru-Virattanesvarar temple at Tirukkandiyur, Tiruvural Mahadeva temple at Takkolam and Virattanesvaraar temple at Kilur. This panel has its own artistic merit and the beautiful representation of the early chola art in miniatures. An interesting panel sculpture from **Puńjai** near Kumbakonam, where Varāha carrying the earth goddess is shown fleeing away while the asuras running after Him

The later Pandya sculpture of Varāha found at **Ennayiram** attest the sculptural representation of this period. There are only some inscriptional references about the installation of the Varāha images at Thenthuruperai, Kalladakuruchi in Tirunelveli district.

The sculptures of Varāha of Vijayanagara period are found at Kumbakonam, Srimushnam etc. The Varāha scuplture from Srimushnam shown standing towards the west, but facing the south, and his two arms are resting in his hip. It is believed that this image is of Salagrama. This is the only Yajñavarāha form of Varāha found in Tamil Nadu

In most of the sculptures of Varāha found in between 12th to 15th century CE, are depicted in anthropomorphic form. The god is portrayed in standing posture and holds the goddess in his left side lap. The left leg of the god rests on the hood of Śēsha-nāga in añjali posture; the rescued Bhūdevi, with her hands in añjali hasta is seated gracefully on Varāha's upraised right arm and her legs are supported by his left hand.

BRONZE

There is a great tradition of metal work in India from Proto historic period i.e. Indus valley civilization (about 3000 BCE) to the Vijayanagara period in the South.(18th century CE.The worship in the temple is performed according to the sacred texts known as āgamas. The gods in the sanctum are manifested through an image which had been determined by the community which is going to worship the deity. The āgamas specify three essential forms of worship in the temples, namely the daily worship (nityapūja) the daily festivals (nityotsavās) and the annual or great festivals (mahotsavas) as essential elements in conducting temple rituals.

The principal image inside the sanctum is the immovable deity, generally of stone, and occasionally of wood, stucco or other materials. They are endowed with divine power by consecration, through yajñas, chanting mantras and performing rites. The temples served as the centre of activities of the village. Hence the procession of the deities around the villages necessitated for the casting of the metal images. They started celebrating festivals for the institution of several festivals reflected in the metal images. In Viṣṇu temples the metal images are placed in the main sanctum immediately in front of the main deity among the manifestation of Viṣṇu, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Narasimha alone seems to have been made by metal artists, other images are cast in later time.

The Pallavas who ruled from Kanchipuram were great patrons of art especially the later Pallavas when the finest bronzes were fashioned. In the 10th century there was large scale revival of bronze casting which within a few centuries reached its peak. The Chola were the great patrons of art. The temple building activities of the Cholas period lead to the making bronzes. The festivals also were performed in large number. Hence, the Utsavamurthis were fashioned to meet the needs of the temples. The eleventh century witnessed the construction of separate shrine for Devis. The bronzes of goddesses also came in to existences. In the 12th century CE the temple building activities in Tamil Nadu increased and more festivals were also celebrated. Hence a good number of bronzes were made during this period. Due to the increase in making of bronzes, the workmanship of the bronzes decreased. In the Vijayanagar period 14th to 16th centuries bronze images of incarnation of Viṣṇu came into existence. The Varāha bronze images were cast for worship in temples.

Four bronze images of Varāha are displayed in the Madras Government Museum. The two forms represented are; standing Varāha with goddess on his raised left knee, and another seated Varāha with goddess in his left knee. In Bhūvarāha bears the Bhūdevi on his left knee. The god is shown with two pair of hands the upper two holds the discus and conch. Varāha icons were acquired as treasure trove from Tanjavur district and most of them being small in size. A salient feature of Lakshmi Varāha an image of inferior workmanship and the noteworthy feature was an open lotus flower rests on the up-turned right hand of Varāha, while Lakshmi holds a similar flower by its stalk in her left. These kind of small images were worshipped in the temples to conduct nityapūja worship. These types of small Varāha images are still worshipped at Ādivarāha cave temple at Māhabalipuram and Ādivarāhanatham in Chidambaram taluk. The Varāha bronze images are made for worship even today.

Stucco images

Stucco figures are made out of fired brick and lime mortar. They have the quality of both fired brick and lime mortar. The Mandagappattu inscription term the stucco as sudham. The stucco figurines are normally found in the medieval period temples and they are often white washed, hence the details are not visible. Some of the stucco figures are found painted and are brilliant. The Varāha temple at Tiruvidandai is an important existing temple in worship and the presiding deity is in the anthropomorphic form of the boar. The presiding deity (mulabhera) in the sanctum is originally in mortar or stucco. The god is in standing posture and holds the goddess in his left side lap. The left leg of the god rests on the hood of Śēsha-nāga with his consort in añjali, the two upper hands of the god hold the goddess and right arm rests on the left leg of the goddess. All the

attributes of Viṣṇu are found and goddess faces the devotees. Oil is applied as Thailakkappu to protect the stucco image of the god from deterioration.

The stucco figures of Varāha are also found in Gopurams and Vimanas at Alagarkoil, Thadikombu, Tirukkurnkudi, Nanguneri, Malayadippatti, and Tiruppulani. Viṣṇu and his incarnations are depicted in the temple towers and Vimanas. The annual maintenance and Māhakumbabishekam are conducted to protect them from deterioration.

Wood

In the ancient period the donations were used for conducting great festivals like car festivals, floating festivals and other festivals in the temple. The processional deities were taken around in the car which is made out of wood. Wood carvings from temple car represent various incarnations and act of Siva and Viṣṇu, other gods and goddess and the presiding deity of the temple. Daśāvatāra or ten incarnation of Viṣṇu are depicted mostly in the temple cars of both Viṣṇu and Siva temples. Temple cars bear the wood carving datable to the Vijayanagara period. Varāha was the favourite theme for both the Vijayanagara rulers and the artists. Wood carvings from temple car appear to have covered with hardened oily accretions disfiguring the details of the carvings. The protection of wooden carvings are done by applying oil in the olden days, the modern chemical conservation was done recently.

Ivory

The Ivory is the teeth or tusk of elephant. Ivory is considered to be auspicious for the temple rituals. The temple vāhanas specially the palanquin are carved with ivory. Usually the avatāras of the Lord Viṣṇu are carved in ivory or inlaying of ivory was done on wood carvings. The Viṣṇu temples have the ivory palanquin. Some time the presiding

deity of the temple is also depicted in the ivory carvings. The Tiruvidandai temple has the ivory palanquin.

Paintings

Earliest mural paintings of Pallava and the early Pandya period are found in Tamil Nadu at Panamalai, Kanchipuram, Sittannavasal, Thanjavur, Tiruparuthikunram.. As the art of sculpture making was very popular in Tamil Nadu and some time the sculptural relief were also painted, as in the case of Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram. The paintings of Nayaks of Tanjore, Ginjee and Madurai are also noteworthy. There are paintings of Maratha rulers during 17th century CE. The Thanjavur panel paintings (palagai padam) belong to the Thanjavur school of Art. It spread during the period of Serfoji II (1798-1832 CE) and they were used for worship in houses, temples, and bhajana mantaps. The main themes of the paintings are Varāha, Varāha in Daśāvatāra, Kṛīṣna, Rāma, some aspects of Siva, Lakshmi and Sarasvathi.

Painting of Varāha found on the wall of Varadaraja Perumal temple, at Kanchipuram is a better preserved painting. Painting of Tiruvidandai god Viṣṇu is depicted with his three consorts-Lakshmi, the labels below the paintings mention the goddesses as Thirumagal (Lakshmi), Manmagal (Bhūdevi) and Niladevi. According to the style and palaeographical grounds of the script written on the paintings are dated to 17th century.

The painting at Muthalamman temple at Kodangippatti near Karur is an interesting finding of the paintings of the Nayaks, which is about 200 years old. Ten avataras of Viṣṇu, stories of Kannappar, Markkandeyar and Bhikshatna are painted with grace. The Sethupathi kings of Ramnad constructed the beautiful palace at

Ramanathapuram on the walls and ceilings of the palace beautiful colour paintings are noticed. These mural paintings portray the life style of the Sethupathi kings. The Varāha painting in the Dasavathara group of paintings expresses the artistic skills of the painters in those days. The paintings also have the explanatory labels in Tamil and Sanskrit. In Tamil Nadu, so far existing paintings found in good condition belongs to the Nayaks and Sethupathi kings of 16th and 17th century CE. The paintings of Varāha are even drawn by the artist of the Tanjavur glass paintings even today. The Varāha theme attracted the artist. The paintings of Varāha are also drawn in cloth and paper even today.

Depiction of Varāha and other Daśāvatāra forms not only inspired the ancient, medieval artist who expressed their artistic skill in stone, metal, ivory and wood. The concept of rescuing the earth by Varāha attracted the present day artisans, performing artist of music and dance and they expressed this act in their respective fields.

The music compositions of Mahāraja Sri Swathi Tirunal starts with Kamalajasya in ten ragas and the songs of Jayadeva on Dasavatara are the favourite songs sung by the present day stage musicians.

The depiction of Varāha as the lifter of the earth is also the favourite theme of the Bharathanatyam dance. The dancers show the hand gesture in such way that it depicts the Varāha burrows the earth with His snout.

The exact reference of Varāha as the rescuer of earth and his worship was found in the Sangam literature. This concept and idea of Varāha avatāra later on noticed in the hymns of the Ālvārs and they praised the act of Varāha with more devotion. These ideas also influenced the artist of the Pallava period, was expressed by way of creation of massive sculptural images.

Varāha images were installed and worshipped by the rulers who had that the thrust for expansion and accruing more territories. Later on when the Cholas established their power in Tamil Nadu the worship of Varāha lost importance. The cause for the decline and the reduction of the importance of the worship of Varāha in Tamil Nadu was due to the rise of Saivism. In Śiva temples the western side of the sanctum adorned with Lingothbhava, where in Varāha is depicted in subdued position to Siva. This concept and sculptural representations were mostly found in South India, particularly in the temples of Tamil Nadu. This iconographic form of Śiva was very popular in Tamil Nadu and this aspect can be viewed as an attempt to reduce the popularity of Varāha worship, which had gained prominence in Tamil Nadu during the medieval period. Varāha and other Daśāvatāra forms not only inspired the ancient and medieval artists, but also the present artists who express basic ideas in art objects, music and dance performances. The importance of different religions in Tamil Nadu was exposed to the people by way of art. Like that Varāha avatara also gained momentum in the 7th to 18th Century in Tamil Nadu which has been revealed from the literary and artistic works.

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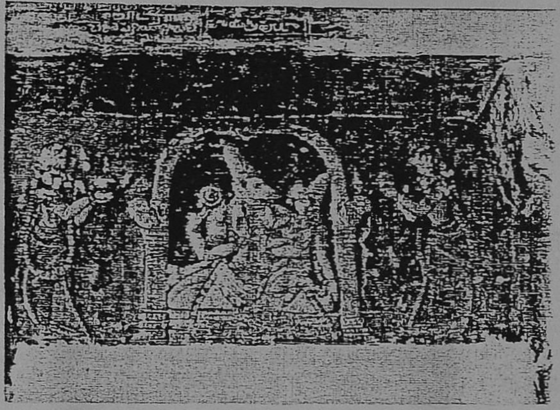
VARĀHA PAINTING KARUR

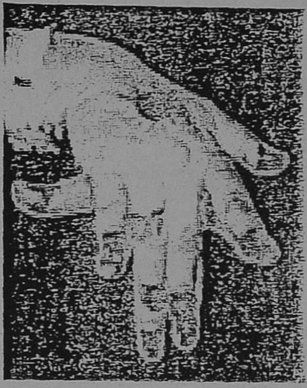
DASAVATHARA PAINTINGS
RAMALINGAVILASAM,RAMANATHAPURAM



VARAHA WITH BHUDEVI PAINTING
VARADHARAJAPERUMAL TEMPLE. KANCHIPURAM

PILLAR REPRESENTATION OF VARAHA
TIRUVELLIKENI

PILLAR REPRESENTATION OF VARAHA
TIRUVELLIKENI (MODERN)



a) ANTONELLA USAI- BHARATHA NATYA POSTURE-
PERFORMING ARTIST- MODERN

b) HAND GASTURE SHOWING VARĀHA DEEP ROOTING THE
EARTH

VARAHA AVATARA OF VISHNU IN ART AND LITERATURE OF TAMIL NADU

by
Dr. S. VASANTHI